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PTQ2440

RELEASED IN PART  
B1, 1.4(D)

PAGE 01 CARACA 00343 01 OF 03 082137Z  
ACTION WHA-00

INFO	LOG-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	EUR-00	VC-00	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	L-00	AC-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OMB-01
	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SS-00
	TRSE-00	T-00	USIE-00	PMB-00	DRL-02	G-00	SAS-00
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O 082101Z FEB 02  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4742  
CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
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AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
AMEMBASSY LIMA  
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
AMEMBASSY QUITO  
AMEMBASSY MEXICO  
AMEMBASSY MADRID

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000343

USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/08/12  
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, VE  
SUBJECT: COLONEL'S PUBLIC CRITICISM OF CHAVEZ RECEIVES  
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- SPONTANEOUS MASS SUPPORT

CLASSIFIED BY DONNA J. HRINAK, AMBASSADOR. REASONS 1.5 (B)  
AND (D)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) AN APPARENTLY WHOLLY UNEXPECTED SHARP PUBLIC VERBAL  
ATTACK ON PRESIDENT CHAVEZ BY AN AIR FORCE COLONEL FEBRUARY  
7 SPARKED MASSIVE EXPRESSIONS OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT FEELINGS.  
THESE INCLUDED A SPONTANEOUS RALLY OF SEVERAL THOUSAND

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
CLASSIFIED BY DEPT. OF STATE, L. R. LOHMAN, DAS, A/ISS  
REVIEW AUTHORITY: ALAN H FLANIGAN  
CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)  
DECLASSIFY AFTER: 8 FEB 2022  
DATE/CASE ID: 06 AUG 2007 200504156

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PEOPLE AROUND THE COLONEL; BANGING OF POTS AND PANS; AND  
HONKING OF CAR HORNS THROUGHOUT THE CITY, INCLUDING IN  
FRONT OF LA CASONA, CHAVEZ'S RESIDENCE.

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END SUMMARY.

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A COLONEL SLAMS CHAVEZ...  
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2. (C) IN WHAT APPEARED TO BE A SURPRISE APPEARANCE AT A  
CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM IN DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACY, ACTIVE DUTY  
AIR FORCE COLONEL PEDRO SOTO SHARPLY ATTACKED PRESIDENT  
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CHAVEZ FOR THREATENING VENEZUELAN FREEDOM. QUOTES  
INCLUDED:

-- "THE CHIEF OF STATE IS NOT THE MASTER OF VENEZUELA. WE  
ELECTED HIM TO GOVERN, TO PUT IN PLACE A NEW MODEL TO  
REPLACE AN EXISTING ONE THAT WAS IN SOME SENSE WORN OUT.  
BUT WE DID NOT THINK THAT HE WAS GOING TO IMPOSE A SYSTEM  
WITH AN IDEOLOGY THAT IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD HAS LED  
TO VIOLENCE, FAILURE AND MISERY."

-- "I AM EXPRESSING THE FEELINGS AND THE VOICE OF THE  
MAJORITY OF THE ARMED FORCES, OFFICERS, NON-COMMISSIONED  
OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS, TO SAY TO THE PRESIDENT, FREEDOM  
OF EXPRESSION IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF HUMAN  
BEHAVIOR, AND WE WILL NOT ALLOW IT TO BE TAKEN FROM US."

-- "OF COURSE THE PRESIDENT HAS TO GO. HE SHOULD RESIGN,  
BUT BEFORE DOING SO SHOULD CONVOKE ELECTIONS SO AS TO LEAVE  
THE COUNTRY IN THE HANDS OF DEMOCRACY."

-----  
...AND FINDS DRAMATIC RESONANCE  
-----

3. (U) FOLLOWING HIS APPEARANCE, COL. SOTO WAS DRIVING  
ALONG THE COTA MIL, THE FREEWAY THAT RUNS ALONG THE BASE OF  
THE MOUNTAINS THAT BORDER THE CITY ON THE NORTH, WHEN HIS  
VEHICLE WAS STOPPED BY A MILITARY POLICE TRUCK. BELIEVING  
THE OCCUPANTS WISHED TO ARREST HIM, SOTO DEMANDED THE

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PRESENCE OF A CIVILIAN OFFICIAL FROM THE PUBLIC  
PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE. A CROWD GATHERED TO PREVENT HIS  
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ARREST, AND THE MILITARY POLICE WITHDREW.

4. (U) WHEN SOTO SUBSEQUENTLY ARRIVED AT THE PLAZA FRANCIA  
IN THE UPSCALE NEIGHBORHOOD OF ALTAMIRA, HE WAS TREATED  
LIKE A HERO BY A CROWD OF SEVERAL THOUSAND PEOPLE, WHOM HE  
BRIEFLY ADDRESSED. A "CACEROLAZO" WHICH WAS TO CONTINUE  
THROUGHOUT THE CITY FOR SEVERAL HOURS HAD ALREADY BEGUN,  
WHILE MOTORISTS HONKED THEIR HORNS AND TURNED ON THEIR  
FLASHER LIGHTS. A SMALLER CROWD OF PERHAPS THREE HUNDRED  
MOVED ON TO LA CASONA (THE PRESIDENT'S RESIDENCE, NOT TO BE  
CONFUSED WITH THE CEREMONIAL MIRAFLORES PALACE) TO CARRY  
OUT A CACEROLAZO OUTSIDE ITS GATES. METROPOLITAN POLICE  
AND NATIONAL GUARD FORMED A CORDON AROUND LA CASONA, BUT  
THIS WAS QUICKLY BREACHED BY THE DEMONSTRATION, ALBEIT  
WITHOUT VIOLENCE. MEANWHILE, SEVERAL HUNDRED CHAVEZ  
SUPPORTERS -- SUMMONED BY LIBERTADOR (DOWNTOWN CARACAS)  
MAYOR FREDDIE BERNAL -- GATHERED IN FRONT OF MIRAFLORES  
PALACE TO SYMBOLICALLY PROTECT IT. AT THE SAME TIME, ANTI-  
GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATIONS COMPARABLE IN INTENSITY TO THOSE  
IN CARACAS TOOK PLACE IN A NUMBER OF PROVINCIAL CITIES.

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	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SS-00
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GOVERNMENT TRIES TO PLAY IT DOWN  
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5. (SBU) CHAVEZ HAS NOT, UP TO NOW, REACTED PUBLICLY TO COL. SOTO'S APPEARANCE OR THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATIONS THAT FOLLOWED. OTHER GOVERNMENT SPOKESPERSONS HAVE SOUGHT TO PLAY DOWN THE ISSUE. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT WILLIAM LARA DESCRIBED SOTO AS MOTIVATED BY BITTERNESS AT HAVING NOT BEEN PROMOTED TO GENERAL (NOTE: SOTO HAS A GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE IN THE PIPELINE.) ARMED FORCE INSPECTOR GENERAL LUCAS RINCON MADE THE SAME POINT. DEFENSE MINISTER RANGEL SAID "ABSOLUTE CALM REIGNS IN ALL THE GARRISONS OF THE COUNTRY. THE NATIONAL ARMED FORCE, IS CARRYING OUT ITS USUAL DUTIES IN ORDER TO SUPPORT THE CONSTITUTION AND TO GUARANTEE THE STABILITY OF DEMOCRACY." THE GOVERNMENT APPEARED TO BE AT PAINS TO KEEP FROM MAKING SOTO A MARTYR. RANGEL STATED THAT THE ORIGINAL INCIDENT WITH THE MILITARY POLICE ON THE COTA MIL HAD NOT INVOLVED AN ATTEMPT TO ARREST SOTO, BUT SIMPLY TO SERVE HIM WITH AN ORDER TO APPEAR THE NEXT DAY BEFORE THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR, AND AS OF WRITING, HE IS NOT UNDER ARREST.

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WHO IS COLONEL SOTO?  
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6. (U) COL. SOTO WAS COMMISSIONED IN THE AIR FORCE IN 1975, THE SAME DAY AS CHAVEZ WAS COMMISSIONED IN THE ARMY. [REDACTED]

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